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Second report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1829 (2008), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report every four months on the activities of UNIPSIL. Accordingly, this report covers the activities of the Office from 1 February to 31 May 2009.

II. Political developments

2. In the reporting period, Sierra Leone experienced a sudden and worrying outbreak of political violence and intolerance that underlined the fragile nature of the nascent democratic process in the country. However, largely as a result of the determination of the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, and the commitment and wisdom of senior political party leaders of the governing party, the All People's Congress (APC) and the main opposition party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), a new round of conflict was prevented. The signing of a joint communiqué by the two parties on 2 April 2009 in the presence of the President, senior ministers, important national personalities and members of the diplomatic corps, and the publicity that was given to that major event, brought the country back on to the track of democracy, peace and stability.

3. From 9 to 12 March, and in the run-up to a local council by-election in Pujehun District, there were violent altercations between SLPP and APC sympathizers, resulting in serious injuries and a subsequent postponement of the election. The by-election was held on 28 March. However, earlier incidents of political violence had an adverse effect on the turnout of potential voters and compelled some villagers to cross the border into Liberia for safety.

4. On 13 March, there was a clash between APC and SLPP supporters in Freetown. Stones and petrol bombs were utilized. The SLPP office and the Freetown City Council building were damaged as a result of those actions. A number of vehicles in the premises of SLPP were burned. On 13 or 14 March, a vehicle belonging to the Resident Minister for the Eastern Province, who is a member of APC, was damaged in an arson attack carried out by unknown persons in Kenema. On 16 March, in what was considered the most challenging incident during this

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period, the SLPP headquarters in Freetown was attacked by riotous crowds. The building was ransacked and badly damaged and a number of SLPP supporters injured. There were allegations that some women were raped and sexually assaulted in the course of the attack. There were also indications that some ex-combatants currently in the service of the law enforcement entities of the State were present during the attack on the SLPP offices. The police appeared overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal effectively with those incidents.

5. Unfortunately, radio stations owned by political parties appeared to have contributed to the atmosphere of political intolerance. Provocative comments from those radio stations compelled the Vice-President, Samuel Sam Sumana, who acted in the absence of the President, to suspend their operations temporarily from 14 March. The Independent Media Commission later confirmed the suspension and the party radio stations have remained suspended ever since.

6. Throughout the events described above, my Executive Representative in Freetown and the leadership of UNIPSIL actively intervened in support of the national authorities to help to end the unfolding violence. UNIPSIL promptly deployed a team, together with the staff of the Political Parties Registration Commission, to Djendema, in Pujehun District, to work with the local police and political parties to ensure calm. UNIPSIL also helped to defuse tensions arising from the arrest of an SLPP local councillor from Kailahun District who was reported to have transported some youths in possession of offensive items to Freetown. My Executive Representative personally intervened on 16 March, when 22 young SLPP supporters were trapped on the roof of the looted party's headquarters, which was surrounded by a large hostile crowd of APC supporters and others, to ensure that they were safely evacuated by the Sierra Leonean police.

7. Immediately after those events, UNIPSIL initiated a dialogue between the two major parties in close consultation with the President and members of the diplomatic corps, with the aim of peacefully resolving all the problems that had heightened tensions between the two main parties of Sierra Leone. The interactive consultations and plenary discussions mediated by UNIPSIL and others resulted in the signing of a joint communiqué by the leaders of the two parties on 2 April 2009, with my Executive Representative witnessing that important development. Later, the third largest political party, the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) indicated that it would also adhere to the agreements of the joint communiqué, making it a de facto multi-party agreement.

8. To build consensus on the positions agreed in the joint communiqué, APC and SLPP separately identified a number of issues which formed the basis for further rounds of discussions. The inter-party dialogue process was chaired jointly by my Executive Representative and the Acting Chairman of the Political Parties Registration Commission. Absolutely crucial for the successful completion of the bipartisan negotiations was the very helpful support given by Sierra Leone's major international partners, especially the representatives of China, France, Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. During the negotiations my Executive Representative continued to closely liaise with President Koroma, whose intervention and strong support made possible early agreement on the joint communiqué.

9. In essence, the joint communiqué calls for a cessation of all acts of political intolerance and violence; the recognition by the Government and the opposition of

their respective roles and responsibilities; and the establishment of independent mechanisms to investigate and review the incidents of political violence and the alleged acts of rape and sexual violence. In the communiqué the President has also committed himself to consult with the opposition on important senior appointments to institutions of national importance.

10. Even more significant are the agreements reached in the joint communiqué that lay the ground for a more constructive future relationship among political parties in developing a bipartisan consensus on important national institutions and policies. The communiqué calls for the strengthening of and bipartisan respect for the State institutions, including the police, the judiciary, the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission and the National Human Rights Commission. The communiqué further stresses the bipartisan consensus on the need to work together to integrate ex-combatants, to disband all militant youth groups and to work together to overcome any hostilities among party youth wings; on the potential dangers posed by political party radio stations; and on the need for an independent national public broadcaster where all points of view can be heard.

11. The implementation of the joint communiqué will require the continued support of the international community. At the request of the President and the political party leaders, UNIPSIL, the United Nations country team and all international partners have drawn up a detailed plan to organize international support. This will include more immediate support to the two independent reviews, to the political party dialogue, the repairs to the SLPP party offices and the strengthening of the police in crowd control. In this context, I would like to stress the importance of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, which has enabled the United Nations system and the international community to respond quickly and effectively in helping to overcome the political crisis.

12. It is important to ensure that the joint communiqué is given the widest publicity throughout the country and to ensure the presence of party organizations in all of the country's provinces. In furtherance of this, the United Nations Radio service in Sierra Leone has played a crucial role. In addition, UNIPSIL has sought to actively engage the influential Inter-Faith Council, various umbrella organizations of the non-governmental organization community and civil society, the national media as well as the Sierra Leonean Artists for Peace to explain the joint communiqué and spread the message of reconciliation.

13. Since the signing of the joint communiqué, positive signs of a change in the mood of the country have been observed. While challenges remain, indications are that the leaders of both political parties have started to embark on the path of reconciliation, which will allow the country to concentrate its collective efforts on the country's future development and on overcoming the many socio-economic challenges it is facing.

14. As a gesture of political reconciliation, President Koroma visited the damaged SLPP offices on 4 April; this gesture was reciprocated by the National Chairperson of SLPP, John Benjamin, who visited the APC offices in Freetown on 9 April. In addition, the SLPP National Chairperson was invited to address the APC National Delegates Conference on 16 May, a historic first. On 27 April, President Koroma was a guest at the anniversary celebrations of the establishment of SLPP. Sierra Leone has witnessed many similar acts of fraternity among various party leaders. These are developments that must be encouraged if they are to take root throughout

the entire country. Youth groups affiliated with SLPP, APC and PMDC also made joint pronouncements of their intention to work towards political tolerance and non-violence. The Inter-Faith Council and other civil society organizations, at meetings with my Executive Representative, also gave their strong support to the joint communiqué and expressed their commitment to play a major role in sensitizing the public on critical aspects of the communiqué. In furtherance of the message of political tolerance and non-violence, the leader of PMDC has held joint meetings with APC and SLPP in the Southern Province.

15. The Government continued to pursue its attitudinal change campaign, which is intended to promote a greater sense of civic duty and accountability at various levels of Sierra Leonean society. President Koroma, in an address to the nation on 14 April, stressed the need for openness, candour and integrity on the part of his Government and pledged that performance contracts concluded by Ministers with the President as well as other important documents will be made public. To institutionalize the campaign, the Government established an Attitudinal and Behavioural Change Secretariat and, on 19 April, President Koroma launched National Pride Week with the goal of instilling a sense of patriotism and dedication to the ideals of service to the nation.

16. In a move intended to energize the Government, President Koroma announced a Cabinet reshuffle on 27 February. Among other changes, the Minister for Mines and Mineral Resources was replaced by the incumbent Minister for Presidential and Public Affairs, and the Minister for Finance and Economic Development swapped positions with the Minister for Trade and Industry. The Minister for Energy and Water Resources assumed the post of Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources. A former representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in the subregion was appointed Minister for Presidential and Public Affairs. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Defence were among Cabinet members who retained their posts.

17. PMDC, a coalition partner of the Government, retained seats in the Cabinet. However, SLPP, the major opposition party, complained that the Cabinet was not representative of all ethnic groups in the country.

18. During the period under review, APC and SLPP held their respective national conventions. John Benjamin, a Minister for Finance and Economic Development in the previous SLPP Government, was elected as National Chairman, while APC unanimously re-elected President Koroma as National Chairperson and standard-bearer of the party for the 2012 presidential elections.

III. Security developments

19. Since the events in March, the overall security situation in Sierra Leone has remained largely calm. The Sierra Leone police have begun prosecuting a number of persons associated with the incident of 16 March at the SLPP offices in Freetown. The Sierra Leonean police have also launched a number of internal reviews to establish the exact sequence and trigger of the violence.

20. The Government of Sierra Leone took concrete steps to combat the trafficking of illegal narcotics, particularly through the enactment of legislation, and the

formation, with support from international donor partners, of the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force.

21. On 20 and 21 April the High Court in Freetown convicted 18 persons, including 8 foreigners, for the unlawful importation of cocaine into the country following the seizure of 703.5 kg of cocaine in July 2008 at Lungi International Airport. The trials were adjudged to have met international standards. Three foreign convicts were immediately transferred to the custody of the United States Government to face further criminal charges in the United States and the impounded cocaine was burned in a transparent process that was witnessed by senior Government officials, by UNIPSIL, and by civil society representatives and the media.

22. The Government of Sierra Leone indicated, on 30 March, that discussions with the Government of Guinea on the Yenga border dispute between Sierra Leone and Guinea had not proceeded as planned. It further revealed that the withdrawal of Guinean armed forces from Yenga and overall efforts to resolve the border dispute were complicated by issues related to command and control.

IV. Economic and social developments

23. The Government established the Office of Diaspora Affairs within the President's office with the objective of optimizing the experience, know-how and financial resources of the Sierra Leonean diaspora for the socio-economic development of the country. This initiative will address gaps in local capacity, boost the flow of remittances to the country and contribute to the development of a strong private sector that can create employment.

24. With the main rainy season just starting in Sierra Leone, the impact of high food prices in 2008 and the consequent low prices in 2009 will weigh heavily on decisions by farmers. Food commodity prices are still high in urban areas, while incomes have remained static. Furthermore, remittances from the diaspora — a main source of income for many families — have been declining, owing to the global financial crisis. Although there is enough food in the country, access, especially among the large numbers of the poor, remains a major concern.

25. The Government has made agriculture and national food production its highest priority, and new programmes, including food- and cash-for-work activities, especially for young people, have been initiated with the support of the African Development Bank, the European Commission, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme (WFP) and numerous non-governmental organizations to ensure that production, processing and market linkages for the national staple crop, rice, are strengthened. To increase food production, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security is providing seed, mechanical ploughing services, and fertilizer, on credit, to groups of small and medium-sized farms. The Ministry is also starting new programmes to improve monitoring and early warning and, with the support of FAO and WFP, to better track production, demand and food insecurity.

26. On 26 March, the President launched a private sector development strategy to develop trade through the private sector and thus reduce reliance on international donors. The strategy would focus on promoting and supporting entrepreneurship,

increasing access to affordable financing, creating marketing access for poor people, and lowering the cost and risk of doing business.

27. On 7 April, a team from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded a two-week mission to Freetown that focused on arrangements for the fourth review of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, as well as the impact of the global recession on the Sierra Leone economy. The team observed that, in spite of the deteriorating global environment, the economic and structural reforms undertaken by the Government had sustained macroeconomic stability. The team also noted that the Government lacked sufficient fiscal space for its development and poverty-reduction programmes. The country's gross domestic output rose by 5.5 per cent in 2008, mainly because of an increase in agricultural production. Inflation remains in double digits, however.

28. In response to an outbreak of yellow fever, the Government, with financial and technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners, carried out a successful immunization campaign targeting the population in Bo District aged 9 months and above (excluding pregnant women) with 84 per cent coverage. WHO further supported an assessment of districts, using mathematical modelling, and 11 of the 13 districts were found to be at risk. As a result, Sierra Leone will conduct a preventive yellow fever mass immunization campaign in May and November 2009 to cover the remaining population, with support from WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). WHO also supported the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in the drafting of the first health sector strategic plan, for the period 2010-2019.

29. In consultation with all major development partners, UNIPSIL will continue to provide technical advice to the Government on a number of key cross-cutting issues such as coastal security and the protection of marine resources, and employment for youth.

V. Human rights and the rule of law

30. While a positive trend towards respect for human rights continues, harmful traditional practices continue to undermine the rights of women and the girl child. WHO estimates that nearly 94 per cent of all girls in Sierra Leone are involuntarily, on most occasions, subjected to female genital mutilation before they reach the age of 18 years.

31. The simultaneous implementation of the three year Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan 2008-2010 which is supported by the United Kingdom Department for International Development, and the "Improving access to justice in Sierra Leone 2009-2011" project, which is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has helped to bring about a comprehensive approach to addressing gaps and challenges in the justice sector.

32. Under a prison reform project, improvement has been recorded in the living conditions in some of the prisons. Overcrowding remains a challenge and efforts at decongesting Pademba Road Prison in Freetown have commenced. The availability of water, sanitation and health facilities also remains problematic.

33. The petition filed by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists to determine the constitutionality of some sections of the Public Order Act of 1965 is still

pending in the Supreme Court. Journalists contend that those sections criminalize libel and thus violate the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. A Chieftaincy Bill to regulate, among other things, the elections of Paramount Chiefs is now pending in Parliament. Progress in the amendment of the Citizenship Act and the Disability Bill remains slow, however.

VI. Implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

34. Almost seven years after the end of the civil war, the Government, with support from the International Organization for Migration and initial funding from the Peacebuilding Fund, has finally put in place the machinery for implementing the reparations programme as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Over the past three months, the Government has registered about 16,500 war victims who have some entitlements to repatriation. Because of the very limited funds, only some of the immediate needs of victims can be addressed, including health care, shelter, education and symbolic reparations such as memorials, remembrances and reburials.

35. To enhance the sustainability of the reparations programme, a three-year strategic action plan is now under development with assistance from UNIPSIL to lay a foundation for multi-donor support to the reparations programme.

VII. Special Court

36. Within the reporting period, the Special Court received US$ 6.5 million from international donors and I thank them for the timely assistance. On 8 April 2009, following their conviction on 25 February 2009 for crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the Special Court sentenced Issa Hassan Sesay, former interim leader, Morris Kallon, former commander, and Augustine Gbao, former senior commander, all of the erstwhile Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to 52, 40 and 25 years' imprisonment, respectively.

37. Except for the ongoing trial of Charles Taylor at The Hague, the Court has concluded all its trials but its appellate processes are expected to continue. In February 2009, the Court organized a consultative forum to consider modalities for the transfer of knowledge to local partners and the archiving of judicial records. The Government of Sierra Leone is engaged in discussions on the transfer of convicted persons to a third country to serve their sentences.

VIII. Constitutional review process

38. Progress on the planned constitutional review has stalled. Thus far, the Government has made no pronouncements on how it intends to deal with the constitutional review report submitted earlier to President Koroma. The United Nations continues to encourage the Government to move quickly with this process and to ensure wider public participation in the exercise as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Lomé Peace Agreement. The United

Nations remains committed to assisting the Government in this process, through the provision of advisory and technical services to the Constitutional Review Commission.

IX. Support to democratic and national institutions

39. As mentioned above, the joint communiqué of 2 April lays the foundation for bipartisan efforts aimed at strengthening vital national institutions critical to the consolidation of the democratic gains in the country.

A. National Electoral Commission

40. In the reporting period, the National Electoral Commission conducted two local council by-elections in Pujehun and Bombali Districts, which were both won by APC. With support from the Basket Fund, construction of office premises, the procurement of warehouse facilities and capacity-building programmes for the Commission have continued.

B. Political Parties Registration Commission

41. With the signing of the joint communiqué, the Political Parties Registration Commission will play an increasingly important role in facilitating a continued multi-party dialogue in Freetown and the three regional centres of Makeni, Bo and Kenema. For this purpose, UNDP, in agreement with all donors to the Election Support Basket Fund, is formulating a detailed technical assistance programme to strengthen the Commission's capacity and to increase its outreach to the three regions. Given the importance to the multi-party dialogue, UNIPSIL political affairs staff will continue to support the activities of the Commission and its acting Chairman.

C. Independent Media Commission

42. The provocative broadcasts by partisan radio stations, which greatly contributed to the violence in March, underlined the importance of having a strong Independent Media Commission to regulate and monitor broadcast media in accordance with the highest international standards. For this reason, UNIPSIL plans to provide assistance through the Peacebuilding Fund to enhance the capacity of the Independent Media Commission to monitor radio broadcasts throughout the country and in all local languages.

D. National Human Rights Commission

43. Significant progress has been made in the functioning of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and building its capacity to discharge its statutory mandate. However, the catalytic funding provided under the Peacebuilding Fund ran out in March 2009.

E. Sierra Leonean police

44. Despite the considerable progress made in establishing a professional police force, the ineffectual response during the recent outbreak of political violence underlines the need for additional technical and logistical support to the police.

Within the framework of the joint communiqué, there is a need for continued training in negotiation and conflict resolution, as well as public order management and crowd control skills. In the coming months, UNIPSIL, together with the United Kingdom Department for International Development, will work with the Sierra Leone police to improve police standards of conduct and responsiveness to public complaints and disorder. It will support crowd control training. Donor assistance for the acquisition of related equipment remains vital and would be sought as a matter of priority.

45. UNIPSIL supported the further strengthening of the Sierra Leone Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force and developed a training curriculum with funding from the United Kingdom Justice Sector Development Programme. The curriculum will provide the Task Force personnel with training on the interdiction and investigation of illicit drug smuggling. With financial assistance provided by UNDP and procurement support from WFP, the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force will begin receiving critical equipment to enhance its tactical, surveillance and forensic capabilities.

46. Given the important pre-war role of chiefdom police, UNIPSIL is supporting the Sierra Leone police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in developing a programme to revive chiefdom policing by providing training and equipment to 974 chiefdom police. To strengthen security in the country, as well as to provide early warning mechanisms, chiefdom security committees will be established in the 149 chiefdoms of the country.

F. Anti-Corruption Commission

47. The Government reiterated its commitment to fight corruption which was identified in the national Agenda for Change as a major risk for the socio-economic development of the country. The Anti-Corruption Commission continued to make progress in tackling corruption and ensuring accountability through the implementation of a three-pronged strategy based on education, prevention and enforcement.

48. The Commission collaborated with UNICEF to ensure that strong anti-corruption messages are included in the country's education curriculum. The Commission also began working closely with other Government institutions to mainstream anti-corruption into their activities, particularly the development of codes of conduct for various public entities including local councils, the Parliament and the civil service as means of advancing its anti-corruption agenda. Through its enforcement mechanisms, the Commission ensured the conviction of nine persons, and recovered about Le 788 million representing unpaid taxes which were remitted to the Government's Consolidated Revenue Fund.

49. The Government of Sierra Leone continues to provide financial support to the Commission. Similarly, the United Kingdom Department for International Development undertook, in the reporting period, to provide £2 million in support of the Commission's activities. UNIPSIL and UNDP are working together to develop a further assistance package for the Anti-Corruption Commission that provides essential training and logistical support.

G. Youth employment scheme

50. Youth unemployment and underemployment remains one of the most intractable problems facing the Government. The limited prospects for paid employment, and the lack of relevant skills and basic education that would enable young people to qualify for entry into formal training institutions, have led many of them to engage in unproductive activities and to remain susceptible to crime and negative manipulation.

51. UNIPSIL and other international partners will support the Government's Youth Empowerment and Employment scheme, which aims to create income opportunities, mainly through the application of an apprenticeship scheme. If strengthened, the scheme would provide rapid employment opportunities and income-generating activities for young people and would assist in mainstreaming youth employment into all national policies and development initiatives.

X. Decentralization and devolution of authority

52. The Decentralization Secretariat began validating the constitution of the ward committees to ensure compliance with the Local Government Act of 2004, as well as to determine the level of training that may be required by ward members. The secretariat also began preparation for a number of important activities, including training on project monitoring and on gender, leadership and advocacy on skills for female councillors. The secretariat conducted capacity-building programmes in financial management and record-keeping for staff of local councils. In March, the secretariat carried out monitoring visits to all 19 local councils to verify use of the local government development grants and the flow of funds to certain devolved sectors.

53. In spite of achievements made in the decentralization and devolution process, there is still a need to realign the Local Government Act with other relevant existing legislation so as to provide a sound legal basis for devolved responsibilities.

XI. Media development

54. Following the suspension of the two main radio stations in the wake of recent political violence, the Cabinet formally approved draft legislation for the creation of an autonomous new independent public broadcasting corporation. The Parliament is expected to debate and vote in May, on the broadcasting reform bill, which was publicly endorsed by SLPP and APC as part of the joint communiqué of 2 April.

55. The broadcasting reform process is actively supported by UNIPSIL in accordance with Security Council resolution 1620 (2005), by which the Council mandated UNIPSIL to assist the Government in building an independent and capable public radio service in support of a national culture of peace, dialogue and participation.

XII. Implementation of the Joint Vision

A. Finalization of the United Nations peacebuilding strategy for Sierra Leone

56. UNIPSIL and the country team have now completed the documents for the Joint Vision. These include political and developmental benchmarks for the peacebuilding efforts of the United Nations system, and a summary of all projects and programmes that will be implemented under the Joint Vision. Furthermore, all the mechanisms for enhanced integration are to be fully formulated, including joint programming, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and various joint operational services.

57. The documents, prepared in close consultation with the Government and all major development partners, will complete the development of a joint UNIPSIL-United Nations country team peacebuilding strategy for Sierra Leone. It is hoped that the strategy will be fully supported during the forthcoming special session of the Peacebuilding Commission. The special session will also provide an opportunity to launch the United Nations multi-donor fund in support of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

B. Political and developmental benchmarks

58. Jointly with the United Nations country team, UNIPSIL has developed a series of benchmarks for each of the five priority areas of their Joint Vision. These benchmarks are intended to provide UNIPSIL and the country team with a clear focus and serve as indicators of achievement for their political and developmental activities.

59. The seven benchmarks that are listed under the priority area of peace consolidation are directly relevant to achieving the mandate of UNIPSIL. They are (i) the maintenance of a constructive political climate that allows for free, fair and non-violent presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012; (ii) professional and respected national security forces able to maintain a secure and peaceful environment throughout the country; (iii) greater opportunities for the integration of youth into the economic and social life of the country; (iv) effective support to the Government to prevent illicit drug trafficking; (v) tangible progress in reducing corruption that receives international recognition; (vi) the improved observance of human rights and access to justice; and (vii) an increasingly professional media and the full establishment of the first independent public broadcasting service for Sierra Leone.

C. Regional field offices

60. As an integral part of the Joint Vision strategy, two regional offices were established in Kono and Bombali districts and six other regional field offices are in the process of being created in Kenema, Bo, Kailahun, Pujehun, Port Loko and Kabala. The field offices will enable all United Nations agencies, programmes and funds as well as other development partners to have greater outreach and operate from one location in each of the districts. The offices are also intended to enhance the work of development partners by providing them with office facilities, logistical support and local contacts. Within each of the regional field offices, a separate liaison office for local non-governmental organizations and civil societies will be established.

D. UNIPSIL headquarters

61. In an effort to consolidate its operations following the closure of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), UNIPSIL moved to a new and smaller location, resulting in substantial savings in rent and operating costs. UNIPSIL has now completed the recruitment for most of its substantive staff and it is hoped that, by the end of June, the office will have reached 73 per cent of its authorized staffing levels. With requisite General Assembly approval, UNIOSIL handed over to the Government 39 vehicles and some office furniture, while 75 computer sets will be handed over in due course.

XIII. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission

62. From 20 to 24 April, the Chairman of the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador John McNee, visited Sierra Leone and held several meetings with President Koroma, senior Government officials, members of the opposition parties, civil society groups, the Human Rights Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, members of the diplomatic community, United Nations officials and members of the Sierra Leone security sector. One of the main objectives of the visit was to prepare for the high-level special session of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone, to be held on 10 June 2009.

63. As part of that visit, Ambassador McNee participated in the opening of the joint United Nations regional field office in Makeni, which provided him an opportunity to see at first hand the United Nations ability to operate in the provinces in an integrated and coherent manner. He also attended the inauguration of the Djendema Integrated Border Control Post which was built by UNDP with funds provided by Japan. The post is the largest and most strategic border crossing between Sierra Leone and Liberia, and is part of the main thoroughfare linking the capital cities of all Mano River Union countries.

A. Preparations for the special session of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone

64. In view of the recent political disturbances and the global financial crisis it will become ever more important to close ranks between the Government and its international partners in order to secure the national and international funding required to overcome the lingering socio-economic problems of Sierra Leone and to secure its future development. For this reason, I attach great importance to the special session of the Peacebuilding Commission of 10 June and pledge my personal support to making the session a success. A successful special session would prepare the ground for the Consultative Group meeting that will be held in London on 19 and 20 November 2009, with the kind support of the British Government.

65. I hope that Member States will be able to commit themselves to support the President's Agenda for Change and adapt their assistance programmes accordingly. I equally hope that the Peacebuilding Commission will fully endorse the peacebuilding strategy of the United Nations system, the Joint Vision and its programmes and implementation mechanisms. In particular, I hope that at the special session Member States will launch the joint United Nations multi-donor trust fund.

B. Projects of the Peacebuilding Fund

66. The Peacebuilding Fund's funding envelope of $35 million will have been fully utilized by the end of June 2009. Currently, $32.7 million (or 93 per cent) have been allocated for 14 projects (11 are active while 3 are operationally closed) and the remaining $2.2 million (or 6 per cent) are expected to cover the six projects in the pipeline that will be approved in June 2009. It is expected that all 20 projects (99 per cent) will be fully implemented by the end of 2009. The last 1 per cent of the funds remains in a small contingency fund within the Peacebuilding Fund envelope that will be used as part of a support package for following up on the implementation of the joint communiqué.

67. An external review of all Peacebuilding Fund-supported projects in Sierra Leone was conducted in April 2009. The review concluded that while the structures and processes that were put in place for managing the Peacebuilding Fund in Sierra Leone were problematic, the overall performance of the 14 programmes supported by the Fund, with one or two exceptions, has generally been satisfactory. The review is expected to identify important lessons for the establishment and management of the United Nations multi-donor trust fund.

XIV. Observations

68. The recent outbreak of political violence served as a wake-up call for the Government and people of Sierra Leone on the critical challenges that require urgent and continued attention. The violence also served as a stark reminder for the international community of the importance of its continued support for Sierra Leone's peace consolidation process.

69. Indeed, the recent disturbances had the potential to evolve into a full-blown conflict: increasing regional divisions in the country, increasing identification of political parties with ethnic loyalties, a relentless migration of young people into the main urban centres, the huge numbers of unemployed and underemployed youth with limited or no hope for a better future coupled with the spiralling food prices, the reductions in remittances and other effects of the global financial downturn, all contribute to create a climate in which political violence could have easily thrived.

70. Against this backdrop, the determined manner with which Sierra Leone overcame its recent political crisis was all the more laudable. In displaying a determination to resolve suddenly emerging differences, instead of giving in to a vicious cycle of attacks and counter-attacks, the leaders and ordinary citizens of Sierra Leone have not only offered hope for their own future but have set an example for other countries in the subregion experiencing similar political disturbances.

71. I commend the President of Sierra Leone, the political leaders of the governing and the opposition parties and, indeed, all Sierra Leoneans, for their determination to rise above their differences and overcome the recent political disturbances, thereby consolidating the peace in their country. The joint communiqué of 2 April constitutes a document of great national significance and I am encouraged that all major parties have now declared their adherence to it. The United Nations stands ready to support national efforts for the implementation of the agreements contained in the joint communiqué.

72. Over the recent months, the country has also made progress in dealing with three immediate threats to peace and security that I had outlined in my previous report to the Council. The Anti-Corruption Commission, motivated by the President, has become much more assertive in pursuing corruption cases brought against Government officials. The President has taken the final steps to nominate a Youth Commissioner to help to kick-start programmes in support of youth employment and empowerment. Furthermore, the recent sentencing and expulsion of the three main drug traffickers and the public destruction of the confiscated cocaine has sent a clear message to international crime syndicates that Sierra Leone is ready to fight any attempt to use its territory as a transit country.

73. While I am generally encouraged by developments in Sierra Leone, I remain concerned that the global financial crisis could decrease the international resources that will be available to Sierra Leone over the coming years. I therefore call on all Member States to continue to provide financial and other support to Sierra Leone's peacebuilding efforts.

74. While the international community continues to play its part in support of the Sierra Leone peacebuilding process, I urge the Government and people of the country to remain committed to building a stronger economy anchored on meaningful utilization of its natural resources, which should be used to promote lasting peace and sustainable development. This is the time for Sierra Leoneans to harness their rich natural resources endowment, reinforced by the support of the international community, to rebuild their country's economy on a strong foundation, and to bequeath to future generations a nation that is strong, peaceful and stable.

75. Finally, I thank the Government of Sierra Leone, especially President Koroma, and the people of the country for their continued collaboration with the United Nations. I also thank my Executive Representative, Michael von der Schulenburg, and his UNIPSIL colleagues, as well as the United Nations country team, for their relentless efforts to realize the mandate of the peacebuilding mission.